



PUT YOUR SPIRITUALITY TO WORK

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

3.5 DEFINING BUSINESS SUCCESS

If we draw from the wisdom of spiritual teachings, we can see that business success, from a spiritual point of view, naturally becomes contribution to society and spiritual fulfilment.

ONE OF THE questions we love to ask spiritual-based executives is, “How do you define business success?” While their answers are as unique and diverse as their personalities, invariably they have the same theme: to promote the inner happiness and fulfilment of everyone involved, and to sincerely make a positive contribution.

With this theme, each of these leaders has been extremely successful in growing their organisations and generating financial prosperity. They are clearly demonstrating that it’s possible to keep their attention on serving others and fostering spiritual fulfilment while being successful in worldly endeavours. The principles they’re following seem to correlate with the wisdom we have found in the ancient Indian Vedas. These scriptures describe four goals of a “successful life”:

- *dharma* – living in harmony with creation and contributing to the well-being of society
- *artha* –generating the wealth of good education, health, money, and character
- *kama* – satisfying desires through a life of comfort, health, enjoyment, and status for oneself and one’s family
- *moksha* – attaining spiritual fulfilment

Most importantly these scriptures tell us how to balance these four priorities in order to attain true success:

- Generating wealth (*artha*) is to be pursued within the larger priority of contributing to the well-being of society (*dharma*).
- Satisfying desires (*kama*) is to be pursued within the larger priority of spiritual fulfilment (*moksha*).

In accord with the wisdom of these spiritual teachings, we can see that business success naturally emphasises *contribution to society* and *spiritual fulfilment*. When traditional measures of business success – shareholder return, market share, industry power, and so on – are subordinate to these higher priorities, wealth can be generated and desires can be satisfied while naturally promoting well-being rather than harm, service rather than greed, and an uplifted spirit rather than unscrupulous competition.

But are these priorities really practical in a business? Consider the example of the Hard Rock Café chain of restaurants, founded by Isaac Tigrett when he was less than 20 years old. He was living in London when he noticed...

In England in those days, the social classes were still completely separated. There was literally no place in London where a baker and a banker could meet to talk. I wanted to break that system.

He opened an “absolutely classless” restaurant in the ultra-fancy Mayfair district. His timing, concept and location clicked from the word go: bakers and bankers, labourers and Labour politicians were all standing in line from the very first day. The rest is popular history of traditional success, as his chain of restaurants grew to become a worldwide phenomenon. But was this the only way Tigrett defined business success? No.

Success for him was making a positive contribution to society – “breaking the class system” – plus the spiritual upliftment of employees and customers. While on a spiritual pilgrimage in India he heard the saying, “Love All, Serve All.” To him, it embodied the ultimate spiritual goal of life: to love people and to serve from that place. That became the spiritual source of the company culture:

All I did was put spirit and business together in that big mixing bowl and add love. I didn't care about anything but people... just cherish them, look after them, and be sensitive to them and their lives.

An important conclusion we have drawn from all of this is that if we look to the worldly definitions of success – and thus pursue wealth and desires by themselves – we will continue the current cycles of greed, corruption and disparity of wealth that are now so prevalent in our world today. However, if we turn to the wisdom of our spiritual basis, we can indeed foster business success that produces harmony, wealth, satisfaction, and spiritual fulfilment.

Muhammad and Confucius sum it up well:

Wealth properly employed is a blessing, and a man may lawfully endeavour to increase it by honest means. (Sayings of Muhammad)

Virtue is the root. Wealth is the result. The Great Teaching. (Confucius)

So, ask yourself: *From my spiritual view, how would I define success for myself as a spiritual-based leader and for the organisation that I lead? How would I describe the balance of priorities in my definitions of success?*

This article is an excerpt from the book, *Put Your Spirituality to Work: Spiritual-Based Leaders*. To download the full book of articles, as well as additional book chapters, articles, workbooks, and research on the subject of “spirituality and human values for leadership and work”, visit our website: www.globaldharma.org